

## SPEECH

OF

## HON. B. L. CLARKE, OF KENTUCKY,

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MONDAY, JUNE 26, 1848.

*In Committee of the Whole on the State of the Union, on the Civil and Diplomatic Appropriation Bill.*

Mr. CLARKE said:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: Since the nomination of General Taylor by the Philadelphia Convention as a candidate for the Presidency, numerous inquiries have been submitted from all parts of the Union as to his political faith and creed, and the positions he occupies upon the important questions which have heretofore separated the two great political parties. It is maintained, and I think justly, too, that the people, whose agent he seeks to be, have the right to know the principles by which he intends to be governed in the event of his election. When the member from Pennsylvania [Mr. STEWART] announced, in the commencement of his speech just delivered, that he intended to furnish and show the political platform upon which General Taylor stood, I had supposed that his speech would consist of something more than his usual vituperation and tirade of abuse of others. In this I have been doomed to disappointment; for in his hour's speech he has only briefly referred to General Taylor's very peculiar views upon the subject of the veto power, and declared that General Taylor is the peace candidate, and a man whose feelings are all opposed to war. It is not difficult to perceive that this declaration is intended for the northern market, whilst in the South and Southwest, where it may be necessary, he will be held up as the greatest warrior, the most renowned military chieftain of this or any other age. I propose, first to inquire in what those peace, anti-war propensities of General Taylor consist; and I beg leave here to say that I do this without the least intention of disrespect to General Taylor. I am always willing to concede to a gallant soldier everything to which he is entitled. Still, I should like to know in what portion of the history of General Taylor he finds authority for this statement. Does he not know that in early life General Taylor sought the science of arms as a profession? Does he not know that his whole life has been employed in teaching one man how he could most skillfully and scientifically take away the life of his fellow? Does he not know that General Taylor was the first man who advised the use of blood-hounds in the Florida war—a weapon in warfare once so much deprecated? Does he not know that General Taylor was instructed by his Government to "be careful to avoid any acts of aggression, unless an actual state of war should exist" with Mexico, and that General Taylor, without any countermanding orders whatever, erected his batteries within one hundred yards of the public square of Matamoros, a Mexican city, in a Mexican country, with his cannon pointed directly upon the public buildings? I believe lawyers say that it is an assault in law to present a gun in shooting distance, and justifies a battery from the opposite party. Does he not

know that General Taylor was positively instructed to leave the navigation of the Rio Grande river free until further instructions? and that without any further instructions he blockaded the mouth of that river, for the reasons given in his letter of April 23, 1846, in which he says, alluding to the blockade, "It will at any rate compel the Mexicans to withdraw their army from Matamoros, 'where it cannot be subsisted,' or to assume the 'offensive on this side of the river?'" Does this indicate a very strong desire for peace? Here, sir, Mexican citizens, in a Mexican city, in a Mexican country, are to be starved to death, driven from their own city, or forced to cross the Rio Grande and make battle upon us, and this, too, by a man whose feelings are all opposed to war. Does he not know that the Mexican authorities complained more of these two unauthorized acts of General Taylor than of any other two acts in the whole history of the war? and that it is highly probable that the Mexican forces never would have crossed the Rio Grande except for those two acts, by which they were constrained to starve to death, leave their city, or cross and give us battle? I make no complaint of this; but it is for gentlemen who have opposed this war at every step, who have declared it unconstitutional, and a war of invasion, to reconcile the inconsistencies of their past and present position.

Mr. STEWART. Will the gentleman answer me a question?

The CHAIRMAN. Will the gentleman from Kentucky yield the floor to the gentleman from Pennsylvania?

Mr. CLARKE. I will not yield the floor to that member, whose courtesy never prompts him to yield the floor to others. He must pursue the advice he gave me—"wait until he can get the floor."

Mr. Chairman, with all the investigation which I have been enabled to bestow upon the subject, with the speech of the member from Pennsylvania, [Mr. STEWART,] together with the means of information furnished by General Taylor himself, I am yet unable to determine his political principles, or to what school in politics he belongs. In May, 1847, Edward Delany, of Louisiana, addressed a letter to General Taylor, in which he asked his views on several subjects: First, as to the justice and necessity of the Mexican war on our part; secondly, as to the necessity of a national bank, and the power of Congress for creating such an institution; third, as to the effects of a high protective tariff, and the right of Congress under the Constitution to create such a system of revenue. In General Taylor's reply, dated June 9, 1847, he says:

"As regards the first Interrogatory, my duties and the

position I occupy, I do not consider it would be proper in me to give any opinion in regard to the same. As regards the second and third inquiries, I am not prepared to answer them. I could only do so after duly investigating those subjects, which I cannot now do; and I must say to you, in substance, what I have said to others in regard to similar matters, that I am no politician."

From this letter, it seems that General Taylor has not sufficient respect for the wishes of the people to give his views on the first question; and, from his answer to the second and third, it is perfectly manifest that one of these facts exists: either that he has never examined the Constitution and history of his country; or, if he has, he prefers a concealment of his principles from the public eye. And be the one or the other true, he forfeits all claim to public confidence in connection with the Presidency, either on account of his avowed ignorance of the Constitution, the powers of the Government, and the politics of the country, or his want of candor, and confidence in the people, in refusing to declare his principles, if he have any. Notwithstanding this announcement of General Taylor, he has nevertheless informed us that he is "a Whig, but not an ultra Whig." I am advised, Mr. Chairman, that great curiosity and anxiety prevails throughout the whole country to know in what consists the difference between "a Whig" and "a Whig, but not an ultra Whig." Some, in the exercise of their imaginations upon this new and very interesting question, determine this to be the distinction: that "a Whig" is one who is "prepared to answer" questions; one who has "duly investigated the subjects," and understands them; one who will be the "exponent of Whig principles;" and one who will not oppose the regular nominee of a Whig Convention, if that nominee should be Mr. Clay;—that "a Whig, but not an ultra Whig," is one who will not be the "exponent of Whig principles;" one who will still be a candidate for the Presidency, though Mr. Clay should be the nominee of a Whig National Convention; one who is "not prepared to answer" questions, and "could only do so after duly investigating those subjects," which he "cannot now do," and therefore knows nothing about them. For myself, I have always understood a "good Whig" to be one who was opposed to the extension of the "area of freedom," and consequently of the blessings of civil and religious liberty, by this Government; one who was in favor of a mammoth Bank of the United States—an institution which, by the concentration of capital in the hands of a few, and the enjoyment of exclusive privileges, not extended to the millions, (who, as God has directed, earn their bread by the sweat of their faces,) holds the destiny of the nation at will, and, by expansions and contractions of a paper circulation, places whatever value it may please upon the rewards of honest industry. "A Whig" is one who is in favor of a repeal of the tariff of 1846, and a restoration of the principles of the tariff act of 1842, which latter, in my judgment, creates an unjust and oppressive distinction between the labor and capital of the country, imposing immense burdens upon the oppressed many, for the benefit of a favored few. "A Whig," sir, is one who is in favor of a magnificent system of internal improvements by the Federal Government, to prosecute which millions of dollars are to be collected from the industry and consumption of the country, and squandered upon favorite localities. "A Whig" is one who has been in favor of a system of voluntary bankrupt laws, whereby a debtor may, against the will and consent of an honest creditor,

compensate him in his declining years for the proceeds of a life of care and industry with a bankrupt certificate. "A Whig" maintains that Congress does possess the constitutional power to do all these things.

My colleague [Major GARNES] is reported to have said, in a recent speech delivered by him in Boston, I believe, that he was "the high priest of Whiggery" in Kentucky; that General Taylor was as good "a Whig as he was; that he walked like a Whig, talked like a Whig, and laughed more like a Whig than a pig could squeal like a pig." I suppose my colleague agrees with other good Whigs who insist upon the constitutional power of Congress over the subjects of bank, tariff, internal improvement, distribution, &c. Now, I demand of my colleague to know when, at what time, and under what circumstances, General Taylor has ever asserted his belief in the constitutionality of these measures, and upon what authority he can assert that General Taylor is "a good Whig." This is an attempt, sir, to impose General Taylor upon the honest and confiding Whigs of the nation, by politicians and office-seekers, over his repeated declaration that he is not prepared to answer these questions—that he has not investigated these subjects, and that he is no politician. Permit me to inquire, what assurance gentlemen have, that upon the investigation of which General Taylor speaks, he will arrive at their conclusions, rather than the conclusions of Mr. Jefferson, whose principles and opinions he sometimes pretends to admire; and who, to the very day of his death, declared that the Constitution conferred no power upon Congress over these subjects? Has General Taylor yet made the investigation? has he yet arrived at a conclusion? Having lived for some sixty or seventy years, with the labor of 280 slaves to furnish him ample opportunity for study, without forming some opinion of the Constitution and powers of the Government under which he has lived so long, it is but fair to presume that he has not. I confess that I am at a loss to know by what means gentlemen can determine to what conclusions his investigations will bring him, if he ever make any. Suppose, then, if he do investigate, he arrive at the conclusion that a bank of the United States and protective tariff are both unauthorized by the Constitution, will he then be a good Whig? What assurance, I ask, can you give your constituents that his conclusions will be any other? Your representations deceived the people in 1840; and I tell gentlemen that the people will not submit to be Tylerized again so soon. The New York Herald of June 17, 1848, (which, by-the-by, is perhaps the ablest Whig paper in the United States, and which was the second paper to hoist the name of General Taylor for the Presidency,) says:

"The new platform or creed of the Taylor party cannot be understood by any development made by the Philadelphia Convention—for they made none—but merely slaughtered Mr. Clay. That body made no declaration of principles, but confined itself simply to the nomination of General Taylor. Other conventions as well as it, during the past year, have also nominated General Taylor, as well as mass meetings and legislative bodies. There must, therefore, be a difference of opinion among all these nominating bodies and conventions, which can only be adjusted and regulated by the expressed opinions of General Taylor himself. The letters, therefore, of General Taylor upon political subjects, constitute the only source from which we can ascertain the opinions and purposes of the new party."

I know, sir, that the free voters of my proud old State, Whigs and Democrats, who are always anxious to know, and who have been accustomed to know, the views and principles of a candidate

for their suffrages, will be much gratified to learn the principles of this candidate of "the new party," and particularly in what the distinction consists between "a Whig," "a Clay Whig," and "a Whig, but not an ultra Whig." Then, sir, I propose a reference to his letters, by way of ascertaining something about the principles of "a Whig, but not an ultra Whig." Here is an extract from General Taylor's letter to Mr. J. W. Taylor, of Ohio, dated May 18, 1847, in which is the following:

"I am not prepared to say that I shall refuse if those country calls me to the Presidential office, but that I can and shall yield to no call that does not come from the spontaneous action and free will of the nation at large. In no case can I permit myself to be the candidate of any party, or yield myself to party schemes."

This, I suppose, is the doctrine—the political creed—of "a Whig, but not an ultra Whig;" and I think this will be new doctrine to my old Whig friends in Kentucky, who have always been proud to acknowledge their candidates for office as the candidates of the Whig party, and who have never regarded a Whig as a "good Whig" who would not be the candidate of the party, upon the terms of the party, and the exponent of their principles.

Again, in his letter to General Peter Sken Smith, dated July 6, 1847, General Taylor makes the following declaration:

"I can only say, with all candor, that, if elected to that office, it must be by the spontaneous will of the people at large, and without any agency or pledge on my part in any particular. If I ever fill that high office, it must be untrammelled with party obligations or interests of any kind."

The next letter in order, Mr. Chairman, is a very remarkable production, one which, I doubt not, will be well understood by many of our adopted citizens, and by them responded to when they come to the polls. It is a letter addressed to G. A. Birkly, President of the Native American Convention, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, dated July 13, 1847. This letter, doubtless, has been well understood by the gentleman from Philadelphia, [Mr. LEVIN,] who has all along been the fast friend of General Taylor, and who is the sole representative of the Native American party upon this floor. Here is an extract from that letter:

"Limited leisure from my public duties constrains me to reply in very general and brief terms to the points cited in your letter. I do not feel myself at liberty to express my FRANK opinion. I am not willing to be the candidate of any party."

What, sir! a candidate for the Presidency not willing to express his opinions FRANKLY! But I will proceed.

Another of his series is the letter addressed to the Hon. J. R. INGERSOLL, dated August 3, 1847; in this letter General Taylor uses the following language:

"At the last Presidential canvass, it was well known to all with whom I mixed, Whigs and Democrats, (for I had no concealments in the matter,) that I was decidedly in favor of Mr. Clay's election, and would now prefer seeing him in that office to any individual in the Union."

The General has admitted that he is uninformed as to the constitutionality or expediency of a bank, protective tariff, &c. It is then to be inferred that his preference for Mr. Clay grew out of feelings of personal kindness rather than any attachment he had for, or understanding of, Mr. Clay's political principles.

Let us now examine his letter to O. P. Baldwin, dated April 20, 1848, but a few weeks before the assembling of the Philadelphia Convention, and see whether time, or something else, has estranged his affections from Mr. Clay. In that letter General Taylor proceeds to say:

"DEAR SIR: Your letter of the 10th instant, which alludes

to certain statements that have been made in some of the papers at the North, and which submits several inquiries for my consideration, has been received. To your inquiries I have respectfully to reply: First, that if nominated by the Whig National Convention, I shall not refuse acceptance, *provided I am left free of all pledges and permitted to maintain the position of independence of all parties to which the people and my own sense of duty have placed me, otherwise I shall refuse the nomination of any convention or party.*

"Secondly, I do not design to withdraw my name if Mr. Clay be the nominee of the Whig National Convention; and in this connection I beg permission to remark, that the statements that have been so positively made in some of the Northern prints, to the effect that should Mr. Clay be the nominee of the Whig National Convention I had stated that I would not suffer my name to be used, are not correct, and have no foundation in any oral or written remark of mine. It has not been my intention at any moment to change my position, or to withdraw my name from the canvass, whoever may be the nominee of the National Convention, either of the Whig or Democratic party."

From this letter, we begin to find out who and what "a Whig, but not an ultra Whig," is; we begin to see how strong were his affections, and how candid his professions of an overweening desire to see Mr. Clay President over any individual in the Union. I believe General Taylor was out of the Union at the time he expressed his longing desire to see Mr. Clay President over any individual in the Union. Of one thing, sir, I am certain: that "a Whig, but not an ultra Whig," is not a Democrat; for if he were, he would, at all times, at all places, and under all circumstances, be willing and proud to avow his principles and opinions to the people—freely, candidly, and honestly, upon all subjects. Sir, there is another thing of which I am equally certain, and that is, that my honorable colleague [Major GAINES] will never be able to convince the Whigs, the Clay Whigs, the old-fashioned Whigs of Kentucky—those, sir, who have been honest in their support of Mr. Clay and his avowed principles—that General Taylor is a "good Whig," particularly after they shall examine the letter which I have quoted, published on the very threshold of a Whig National Convention. General Taylor to be received and adopted by Kentucky Whigs, when he declares that, if elected, he will not be the exponent of Whig principles—General Taylor adopted by the honest Whigs of proud old Kentucky, when, at an old age, he has not yet discovered whether a bank or protective tariff is constitutional or unconstitutional—at a time when there is not a farmer's son in Kentucky, eighteen years of age, who has not formed some opinion upon the constitutionality of a bank, protective tariff, &c.—Kentucky Whigs endorse General Taylor, when he declares his fixed and unalterable determination to run against Mr. Clay, though he were the nominee of a Whig National Convention! No, sir; never. Now, I put the question to honorable gentlemen: Suppose, prior to the meeting of the Whig State convention in February last, in Kentucky, some gentleman calling himself "a Whig, but not an ultra Whig" had been brought forward by office-seekers and others, in some of the different counties in the State; and suppose, upon being addressed; this gentleman should reply, that he would accept the nomination of the Whig State convention, with the express understanding that he would not be the candidate of the Whig party, nor the exponent of their principles; but that, if the convention should nominate Mr. Crittenden, or any other, he would not decline, but would run the race against the regular nominee of the Whig convention: I ask, sir, if there are a thousand Whigs in Kentucky who would regard such a man "a good Whig," or a Whig at all? But, for further illus-

tration, suppose the State convention meet and nominate Mr. Crittenden, and this "Whig, but not an ultra Whig," in disregard of the action of the convention and the feelings of the Whig party, still remain a candidate: would not every Whig in the State, from east to west, from north to south, denounce him as a disorganizer, an impostor, and any and everything but "a good Whig?" In what, permit me to inquire, does General Taylor's position differ from the case I have put? If General Taylor is to be believed, he would, at this moment, be a candidate against Mr. Clay, if the late Philadelphia Convention had given the nomination to that gentleman. And yet, sir, with all these incontrovertible and incontestable facts staring them in the face, gentlemen stand up here, and declare General Taylor a good Whig! Whig papers contradict General Taylor himself, by hoisting his name to their mast heads as the candidate of the Whig party for the Presidency, in the teeth of his oft-repeated asseveration that he would not, under any terms or circumstances, be the candidate of any party, or the exponent of any party's principles. Those who have conspired to sacrifice Mr. Clay, in his declining years, having spent a life devoted to the service of his party and their avowed principles, of which he has always been the acknowledged embodiment, now mount the rostrum, and, by way of giving color and importance to their recent abandonment and prostitution of principle, proclaim to a once great but now bewildered and astonished party, that General Taylor is a "good Whig," and that the "new Taylor party principles" will meet with the cordial approval and approbation of Mr. Clay. Does any sane living mortal from his heart believe this? Mr. Clay, who has been abandoned by his party for an available who seeks to ride into power muzzled—Mr. Clay, who has seen himself and his long-cherished principles abandoned by a majority of his pretended friends from his own loved State upon the first, second, and third ballots at the Philadelphia Convention—Mr. Clay, who, by the combination and treachery of those whom he had warmed into life and station, saw his loved principles sacrificed upon the altar of "availability," himself unhorsed, and thrown fainting, bleeding, dying, with his political death-warrant flashing in his face, and but one fast and gallant friend from his own proud State left to ward the final blow directed at the wounded and prostrate chief,—he support General Taylor! Mr. Clay endorse the work of these men who have professed to love but to slay him! No, sir; never, never, unless he has deeply fallen from his once proud and high estate. If he can, he must forget that devotion to the principles of his life which have marked him as the great man of his party. He must forget his repeated invocations of high Heaven to visit our land with war, pestilence, and famine, rather than permit the elevation of a mere military chieftain to the Presidency. He must forget that this is another Tyler movement—a base abandonment of principle for the sake of office. He must forget that he opposed General Jackson, who was a lawyer, a judge, a governor, and a Representative and Senator in Congress—having held all the higher civil offices in the Government—because he was a military chieftain, and that in his opposition to General Jackson for this reason he was sustained and supported by the entire Whig party of the whole Union. He must forget that General Taylor's claims are exclusively and entirely of a military character—that he never held a civil office, or cast

a vote in his life. He must cease to remember all these things, and sink deep in moral degradation if he now recommend to an honest and confiding people a mere military chieftain, without political learning, to an office requiring more varied information, more governmental experience, sober thought, and calm, deep, dispassionate investigation of the history and powers of the Government than all the offices upon earth—an office upon the wisdom of whose incumbent may depend the happiness or misery of unborn millions yet to come. Sir, unless I mistake the man, Mr. Clay never can, he never will, endorse General Taylor.

I will now proceed to a further examination of those letters in which it is said we are to find the principles of this *new* Taylor party. In a letter of General Taylor, addressed to Doctor F. S. Bronson, dated August 10, 1847, is found the following:

*I deem it but due to candor to state, at the same time, that if I were called to the Presidential chair, by the general voice of the people, without regard to their political differences, I should deem it to be my duty to accept the office. But while I freely avow my attachment to the administrative policy of our early Presidents, I desire it to be understood that I cannot submit, even in thus accepting it, to the exactation of any other pledges, as to the course I should pursue, than that of discharging its functions to the best of my ability, and strictly in accordance with the requirements of the Constitution. I have thus given you the circumstances under which only I can be induced to accept the high and responsible office of President of the United States. I need hardly add, that I cannot, in any case, permit myself to be brought before the people exclusively by any of the political parties that now so unfortunately divide our country. It affords me great pleasure, in conclusion, fully to concur with you in your high and just estimate of the virtues, both of head and heart, of the distinguished citizens (Messrs. Clay, Webster, Adams, McDuffie, and Calhoun) mentioned in your letter. I have never exercised the privilege of voting," &c.*

Here again General Taylor reiterates his determination not to be the candidate of any party; and in this letter he announces his discovery of the great virtues, both of head and heart, of the Senator from Massachusetts, [Mr. WEBSTER]—a man, the powers and energies of whose mind have been, and then were directed against the honor and cause of his own country, then involved in war with a savage and treacherous enemy.

Next follows his letter of January 30, 1848, to a Native American in Philadelphia. In this letter General Taylor says:

*"If they desire such a result, (his election to the Presidency,) they must adopt the means best suited, in their opinion, to the consummation of the purpose. And if they think fit to bring me before them for this office, through their Legislatures, mass meetings, or conventions, I cannot object to their designating these bodies as Whig, Democratic, or Native. But in being thus nominated, I must insist on the condition, (and my position on this point is immutable,) that I shall not be brought forward by them as the candidate of their party, or considered as the exponent of their party doctrines. In conclusion, I have to repeat, that if I were nominated for the Presidency by any body of my fellow-citizens, designated by any name they might choose to adopt, I should esteem it an honor, and accept such nomination."*

In this letter, written but a few months since, he declares his fixed and immutable determination not to be the candidate of any party, or the exponent of any party doctrines, and at the same time asserts, that he should esteem it an honor to be nominated by abolitionists, and would accept their nomination.

I will now refer to one or two more of these articles of the "political creed" of this "Whig, but not an ultra Whig," "new Taylor party," and submit it to the candid and enlightened of all parties to determine, if they can, what principles consistent with the creed of either the Democratic or Whig party are avowed, and in what is General Taylor a "good Whig."

On the 22d of April, 1848, General Taylor wrote his celebrated Allison letter, from which I make the following extract, which seems to furnish an argument against the demands of the people for the principles and opinions of a candidate who asks at their hands a high and responsible trust. The extract and argument is this:

"One who cannot be trusted without pledges, cannot be confided in merely on account of them."

With what grace, permit me to ask, does this argument against "pledges" come from General Taylor—a man who has made more repeated pledges, upon almost all subjects save his political principle, than any other man who ever aspired to the Presidency? Does he not pledge himself, in some half-dozen letters, to maintain his position as an independent candidate? Does he not as often pledge himself that he will, under no circumstances, be the candidate of any party? Has he not, time and again, pledged himself that he would not be the exponent of any party's principles? Has he not, in the most emphatic terms, pledged himself that he would run against Mr. Clay, though Mr. Clay should be the nominee of the Whig National Convention? I apprehend that the friends of this new opponent to "pledges" will find it difficult to reconcile this argument with the repeated pledges to which I have referred. When it suits General Taylor to make pledges upon matters uncalled for by the people, there is no argument in the way; but when the people, in the most courteous and respectful and imploring terms, ask a candidate who has never held a civil office, but who is aspiring to the loftiest position in the gift of a free people, to give his views and opinions upon constitutional construction and interpretation, and upon the great and leading measures which have agitated the country for a quarter of a century, they are told that these are pledges, and "one who cannot be trusted without pledges, cannot be confided in merely on account of them!" Sir, "upon what meat doth this our Cæsar feed, that he hath grown so great?" Has it come to this, that there is one among us who will thus scorn and rebuke the people? Has it come to this, that one who seeks to be a servant has soared so high that the congregated voice of a nation of freemen cannot reach him? Can it be that General Taylor has such contempt for the intelligence of the people as to suppose them unable to make the distinction between a "pledge" and an *honest expression of opinions and principles*? No one has asked a pledge from General Taylor, though he has given many unsolicited. He has been asked for his *opinions and principles* upon great questions, in which the whole country is interested, and in reply they are told, that "one who cannot be trusted without pledges, cannot be confided in merely on account of them." Is this too much to ask of one who never voted, who never held a civil office, and whose principles were wholly and entirely unknown? Has this been the doctrine of either of the great parties, from the origin of the Government down to the present day? Was it ever the doctrine of Mr. Clay? Let a brief review of the history of parties answer. In 1824, General Jackson, Mr. Clay, and other candidates for the Presidency, gave their views and opinions and principles, in letters and speeches. So in 1833. So in 1832. In 1836, Mr. Van Buren and the other candidates were addressed, by Hon. Sherrod Williams, upon the subject of their political principles and opinions, to which they responded. In 1840, General Harrison, in answer to repeated

letters addressed to him, referred the people to his past speeches, circulars, and votes, as his articles of political faith. In 1844, Mr. Polk, Mr. Clay, and Mr. Van Buren were all called on by the people for their views and opinions in reference to the annexation of Texas and other subjects. Did either of those gentlemen attempt to confuse the honest expression of opinion and declaration of principles, with the idea of a *pledge*? No, sir; each responded in lengthy and able letters, which were read and understood by the people. Yet General Taylor is a "good Whig."

Mr. Chairman, I thank my God that the political power of this nation is in the hands of the people; but, sir, if this new doctrine is to be ingrafted upon our institutions, how is it possible for this power to be transferred understandingly to the agent? If it is to be ingrafted, I wipe my hands of it.

"Shake not thy gory locks at me;  
Thou canst not say I did it."

In no instance of my life have I ever been a candidate for office that I was not ready, at all times and places, to give my opinions *frankly* and fully upon all and every political question; nor have Whigs or Democrats in Kentucky ever regarded any candidate as worthy their confidence who refused so to do upon any pretence; nor will they, unless a strange insatiation has seized upon their judgments. I put the question to gentlemen on the other side of this Hall: Is there one among you who would be rash enough to assume such a position before your constituents? Is there a Representative upon this floor who would dare say, when called on by the people for his opinions, that he would stand above them, "make no pledges," and thus attempt to conceal his principles? Sir, there is not one who would commit such an act of *felo de se*. If this be the true theory, it results in this: that any one who has sagacity enough to say he will "make no pledges," directly becomes amply qualified for the Presidency or any other office in the gift of a free people; just acknowledge that you are "no politician," and will make "no pledges," and you are amply prepared to preside over the destinies of twenty-five millions of freemen. Such a position is a direct insult to the intelligence of the American people—one that will meet with the scorn of all Democrats, and the contempt of all good Whigs. But General Taylor informs us, in his letter of August 3, 1847, that he will construe the Constitution and administer the Government "as it was construed and acted upon by our first Presidents." This, no doubt, was supposed to be a very captivating annunciation.

In his Allison letter, however, General Taylor remarks thus upon the veto:

"The veto power. The power given by the Constitution to the Executive to interpose his veto, is a high conservative power; but, in my opinion, should never be exercised, except in cases of *clear violation* of the Constitution, or manifest haste and want of consideration by Congress."

Let us compare this view of the proper exercise of the veto power with the views of General Harrison, as expressed in his inaugural address:

"The veto power (says General Harrison, who was said to be a good Whig) appears to be highly expedient; and if used only with the forbearance and in the spirit which was intended by its authors, it may be productive of great good, and be found one of the best safeguards of the Union."

He further adds, that, in his opinion, it should "be used only, first, to *protect* the Constitution 'from violation'; second, the people from the effects 'of hasty legislation, where their will has been 'probably disregarded, or not well understood; and,

'thirdly, to prevent the effects of combinations violative of the rights of minorities.'

Here you perceive, Mr. Chairman, General Taylor (who himself confesses his want of political knowledge) assumes that there are but two instances in which the veto or negative power should be exercised by the Executive: first, "when there is a *clear* violation of the Constitution;" thus placing the exercise of all doubtful powers at the full and unrestrained will and discretion of Congress. When there is a *doubt* as to whether a certain power has been conferred upon the Federal Government by the Constitution, or reserved to the States and the people, General Taylor's interpretation and limitation of the veto, in violation of the principles of every President, from Washington down to the present Executive, takes the power from the States and people, thus annihilating State sovereignty, and confers the exercise of all doubtful powers upon Congress; whereby a strong central Government is erected in one department at Washington, based upon the ruins of the reserved rights of the States. With astonishment and alarm for the safety of my country and her institutions, I do confess that this dangerous doctrine is a novel one to me. Where, in the "administrative policy of the early Presidents," does General Taylor find a recognition of the principle that doubtful powers were to be exercised by the Federal Government as a whole, much less by one department, without check or limitation. I know of no Federalist, however deeply imbued with the principles of Hamilton, who has gone so far as to say that all the checks and balances of the Constitution should be annihilated at one fell stroke, and the exercise of all doubtful power placed at the will of Congress. It is true, they contend for certain powers expressly delegated, and others which follow as necessarily incidental. It is true, they contend for a national bank, protective tariff, internal improvement, &c.; but, at the same time, they maintain that the power to establish the one or the other is an expressly-enumerated power, or embraced with the general scope of powers "to make all laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into execution the enumerated powers;" and further than this none have ever gone. No republican President ever did for a moment advance the wild and startling doctrine, that Congress, without limitation or restraint, should be left alone to exercise all doubtful powers. Our early Presidents, in deference to the reserved rights of the States,—and in view of the fact that the General Government was a government of delegated powers limited by the Constitution, always maintained that Congress should refrain from the exercise of doubtful powers. The General Government is a mere agent, created by the sovereign States for express purposes. In all individual transactions, which, I ask, is regarded the safer rule, that the agent shall confine his operations within the authority given, or that, in all cases where he *doubts*, he shall act as though he had authority, and thus bind his principal in a thousand ways never contemplated or intended? There is no difference in the principle, whether applied to an individual, or the Federal Government, as an agent. General Taylor has entirely reversed the rule adopted by all the Presidents. Their rule was, that a bill must be *clearly constitutional* before it could receive the sanction and approval of the President.

General Taylor's rule is, that a bill must be *clearly unconstitutional* to authorize the President to interpose his objections. If the latter be the

true rule, what, then, becomes of the oath of the President to preserve, defend, and protect, the Constitution? I am aware, sir, that it will be replied by some, that the Judiciary department will ultimately settle the question as to whether the Congress have transcended their constitutional limits in the passage of a law; and that if they have, that department will put a check upon them. My reply is, First, If one branch of the Government shall yield to Congress the right to exercise doubtful powers, it furnishes a strong presumption that another will yield likewise. Secondly, That much manifest and irreparable injury may be done to the States and people by the exercise of doubtful power by Congress, before the question can be brought to the Supreme Court for its adjudication and decision. Thirdly, That doubtful powers were never intended to be exercised by Congress. Fourthly, That the rights of the States and people are safer in the hands of a President elected by the States and the people for a limited period, and directly responsible to them, than in the hands of the judges of the Supreme Court, who are the creatures of one department and a half of the Federal Government, who hold their offices during life, and who are above, and wholly and entirely independent of, and irresponsible to, the States or people.

If the objection be well-founded, that the President should not suspend a bill until the sense of the people can be obtained, because the Representatives, fresh from the people, have declared for it—the same objection would destroy the Senate and Judiciary, and merge all the powers of a once well-balanced and well-regulated Government in the lower House of Congress. This, sir, must be the legitimate and inevitable result of such a doctrine; and where, in such a case, I submit, would the Constitution find a shield and protection in a prostrate Judiciary?

In all cases when a bill is sent to the President for his approval, if, upon examination, doubt suggest itself as to its constitutionality, the President calls around him those learned and experienced; they examine the Constitution, the authorities touching the question involved, and interchange views and opinions; and if the President, after this full and fair examination, shall still be left in *doubt*, in compliance with the obligations of his oath, he leaves the power in the hands of the States and the people, and returns the bill with his objections. If, upon the contrary, his doubts are removed by consultation and examination, he signs and approves the bill, and it becomes a law. Such has been the uniform practice of all Presidents. Now, suppose General Taylor shall be President, (which, by the by, is not a supposable case,) what will be his rule, when a bill is presented for his approval? Not the rule of all other Presidents. No, sir; he will not examine to see if it is *clearly* constitutional. Oh, no; but he will examine to see if it is *clearly* unconstitutional. And it matters not how many doubts he and his cabinet and everybody else may have, unless he can be satisfied that it is *clearly unconstitutional*, he will sanction the bill, and thus establish in Congress the right to exercise all doubtful powers.

Mr. Chairman, this is a monstrous doctrine; it strikes down State sovereignty, prostrates two departments of the Government at the feet of the third, and builds up a sort of mobocracy more dangerous to human liberty than the worst monarchy upon earth. I do believe that there is not one State in this Union that will subscribe to such a doctrine. So much, then, for General Taylor's construction

of the Constitution, "as it was construed and acted upon by our first Presidents," thus far.

Now, let us follow him a little further. The second and last instance in which the veto should be exercised is in cases of "manifest haste and want of consideration by Congress." Where, in the "administrative policy of the early Presidents," does he find this doctrine? Which of the early or latter Presidents have ever said that this power which, according to General Harrison, "may be productive of great good, and be found one of the best safeguards to the Union," should be exercised only in two cases: first, "in cases of clear violation of the Constitution;" and secondly, in case of "manifest haste and want of consideration by Congress," as General Taylor assumes? I will yield the floor to any gentleman who will respond.

Mr. GAYLE. Mr. Jefferson maintained the first proposition in a letter to General Washington.

Mr. CLARKE. I have never seen such a letter, and will further say, that if there be such a letter, containing such a sentiment, it contradicts every great principle by which the life of that illustrious statesman was distinguished.

It will be perceived that General Taylor scouts the idea of the exercise of this power either upon the grounds of expediency, or economy, or convenience. In this does he agree with General Washington, who is the acknowledged Father of his Country, and who was the first President that ever presided over the destinies of this nation? He does not. I think, sir, that I will be able to satisfy the world that he either does not know what was the "administrative policy of the early Presidents," or, if he does, he has abandoned that policy in the very breath in which he declares that he adopts it.

The very first time that this now much-abused veto power was ever exercised in this Government, I believe it was exercised by General Washington, and then exercised upon neither of the grounds stated by General Taylor to be the only grounds upon which it should be exercised. In that instance General Washington based its exercise upon principles of expediency, convenience, and economy alone.

Mr. COLLAMER. Will the gentleman inform me whether he means to say there was but one veto by General Washington?

Mr. CLARKE. There may have been two. I have been unable to find but one.

Mr. COLLAMER. And that was an apportionment bill.

Mr. CLARKE. No, sir; it was a bill reorganizing the military establishment.

Mr. COLLAMER. He vetoed an apportionment bill.

Mr. CLARKE. That may be true. I stated this: that General Washington vetoed a bill reorganizing the military establishment. If he vetoed another, as I am informed he did, it only proves that he was quite as much disposed to its use as many others who have followed him, and met with condemnation from certain quarters for its exercise.

Mr. COLLAMER. In what year was this veto of General Washington?

Mr. CLARKE. In the year 1797. The gentleman will see, by examination, that I have used the language of the message. Expediency, economy, and convenience, were the considerations upon which the veto was founded, and not one word about constitutionality, or hasty legislation, can be found anywhere in that message.

For the purpose of putting to rest this senseless clamor about the exercise of the veto power, I

give this message in full from Senate Journal, 3d, 4th, and 5th Congresses, page 339. The veto message:

"Having maturely considered the bill to alter and amend an act entitled 'An act to ascertain and fix the military establishment of the United States,' which was presented to me on the 22d day of this month, I now return it to the House of Representatives, in which it originated, with my objections.

"First. If the bill passes into a law, the two companies of light dragoons will be from that moment legally out of service, though they will afterwards continue actually in service; and for their services during this interval, namely, from the time of legal to the time of actual discharge, it will not be lawful to pay them, unless some future provision be made by law. Though they may be discharged at the pleasure of Congress, in justice they ought to receive their pay, not only to the time of passing the law, but at least to the time of their actual discharge.

"Secondly. It will be inconvenient and injurious to the public to dismiss the light dragoons as soon as notice of the law can be conveyed to them—one of the companies having been lately destined to a necessary and important service.

"Thirdly. The companies of light dragoons consist of 126 non-commissioned officers and privates, who are bound to serve as dismissed dragoons when ordered so to do. They have received in bounties about \$3,000. One of them is completely equipped, and above half of the non-commissioned officers and privates have yet to serve more than one-third of the term of their enlistment; and besides, there will in the course of the year be a considerable deficiency in the complement of infantry intended to be continued. Under these circumstances, to discharge the dragoons, does not seem to comport with economy.

"Fourthly. It is generally agreed that some cavalry, either militia or regular, will be necessary; and, according to the best information I have been able to obtain, it is my opinion that the latter will be less expensive and more useful than the former, in preserving peace between the frontier settlers and the Indians and therefore, a part of the military establishment should consist of cavalry.

"G. WASHINGTON.

"UNITED STATES, February 28, 1797."

Here is an exercise of the veto power clearly upon the grounds of expediency, convenience, and economy, and this done, too, by General Washington. According to the authority of General Taylor, this was all wrong, as the veto power should never be applied "except in cases of clear violation of the Constitution, or manifest haste and want of consideration by Congress." This is the only instance and point upon which General Taylor has avowed any principle, and I now leave it to the country, to all candid men of all parties, to determine how far General Taylor has adopted the "administrative policy of the early Presidents."

But, Mr. Chairman, there is another principle involved in General Taylor's limitation to the use of the veto power more dangerous to one entire section of this whole Union, if possible, than any which I have attempted to discuss. It will be remembered that there is already a strong and growing party in the North, who entertain feelings and opinions of the most deadly hostility to the institutions of the slave States. It will be further remembered, that there are but fourteen slave States, whilst there are sixteen free States, and that the free States have the preponderance of power in both branches of Congress. It will be remembered, sir, that General Harrison said (and all the Presidents were of the same opinion) that the veto power should be used by the President "to prevent the effects of combinations violative of the rights of minorities." It will be well remembered, that General Taylor declares that the veto power should never be exercised in defence of a minority against the oppressions of a mad and infuriate majority. I warn gentlemen from the slave States to ponder well before they sanction such a doctrine and permit it to ripen into precedent. I ask them to look at the daily increase in the ranks of the opponents to our institutions. I ask them if it will not be too

late, when, at midnight's darkest hour, our homes and our altars shall be lighted up by the incendiary torch of fell abolitionism—our wives and daughters outraged, and our once lovely homes and sunny fields desolated with fire and drenched with blood—then, I ask them, then would it not be too late to seek protection from the Judiciary? Protection in what? We have nothing left; our all is gone; and abolitionism has achieved its object and its end. I appeal to my colleagues, I appeal to the entire delegation from the slave States: are you prepared thus to surrender our dearest rights? For one, here in my place, and before high Heaven, I swear I never, never will.

It is known that the slavery question is one of the absorbing and exciting questions of the day—a question which portends to shake this broad fabric, the work of our patriot fathers, to its very base. To hurt the dizzy bright stars that form our glorious political constellation in mad and wild confusion from their peaceful orbits. I demand of gentlemen from the slave States, will General Taylor, if he be elected President of the United States, veto a bill “to prevent the effects of combinations violative of the rights of minorities?” I put the question, will General Taylor veto a bill establishing a Territorial Government in which the principle of the Wilmot proviso is incorporated? I ask gentlemen to answer, and state upon what authority they do answer, will not his limitation of the veto stop him? Let us see what the northern interpretation of his veto restriction is. The gentleman from Massachusetts, [Mr. Ashmun,] in a letter addressed by him to his constituents, a short time since, says:

“General Taylor was not my preference; but I believe him to be a true Whig, an honest and capable man, opposed to the acquisition of Texas, with sound and conservative principles, opposed to further enlarging the boundaries of the Union; and, although he lives in the latitude where slavery is tolerated, yet I do not believe that he desires or approves its extension. His declared sentiments are a guarantee that he will never in the slightest manner interfere with the action of Congress when it shall forbid the existence of slavery in our newly-acquired territories. Let the representatives of the people and of the States be left free to act upon that question, uncontrolled by Executive influence and Executive veto, and we are safe. I need not, I am confident, give to you any new assurance, that whenever the question, in any form, shall be presented, during my official term, the rights of humanity shall find in me an unyielding advocate. The issue will soon come; it is to be met in the halls of Congress; and then it is to be decided, in all probability, during the continuance of Mr. Polk's administration. Let the people of the free States look to their representatives.”

Here, sir, Wilmot-proviso, free-territory men say that General Taylor's declared sentiments are a guarantee that he will never, in the slightest manner, interfere with the action of Congress when it shall forbid the existence of slavery in our newly-acquired Territories. “Let the Representatives of the people and of the States be left free to act upon that question uncontrolled by Executive influence and Executive veto, and we are safe.”

This, I suppose, is the abolition interpretation of General Taylor's principles and “declared sentiments.” What do the slave States say? Will General Taylor veto the Wilmot proviso? Gentlemen had as well break their silence, for the people want to know and will know.

Mr. HASKELL. I will answer the gentleman, if he will allow me first to propound an interrogatory to him.

Mr. CLARKE. I supposed that the gentleman intended to enlighten me by answering my question. I do not stand here to answer his questions.

Mr. HASKELL. I call on the gentleman to answer.

Mr. CLARKE. Answer what?

The CHAIRMAN. Does the gentleman from Kentucky yield the floor?

Mr. CLARKE. I do not. I object, because the gentleman from Tennessee does not answer my question. I put a plain question, and demand a categorical answer, whether he has satisfactory authority to enable him to say that General Taylor would veto the Wilmot proviso?

Mr. HASKELL. Has the gentleman authority for saying as much for General Cass?

Mr. CLARKE. I understand distinctly that I have. Will the gentleman from Tennessee answer it?

Mr. HASKELL. I don't know.

Mr. CLARKE. Here then, sir, is a southern man, who has taken an active part in bringing forward Gen. Taylor as a candidate, proclaiming that he does not know what would be the course of his candidate upon this momentous question.

Mr. HASKELL. I can tell you what I believe. I believe General Taylor is opposed to the doctrine of the proviso.

Mr. CLARKE. Do you believe he would veto it?

Mr. HASKELL, (in his seat.) I don't know. [A laugh.]

Mr. CLARKE. The gentleman still does not know. Here, then, is a palpable and deliberate attempt to practise a fraud upon the South or the North; a cold-blooded fraud, for the purpose of reaching power without regard to principle.

The political history of the country abundantly shows, that whenever an applicant to office conceals his principles, some one is to be deceived; in this case, God only knows who is to be the victim. The fact is now unmistakable. It is confessed to the world, that the warmest supporters of General Taylor do not know whether or not he will exercise the veto power in defence of our dearest rights; whether or not he will defend the rights of an oppressed minority against the invasions of a reckless majority.

I will give a short extract from General Taylor's Allison letter, and then leave the voters of the slave States to determine who is to be the victim. Here is the extract:

“The personal opinions of the individual who may happen to occupy the Executive chair ought not to control the action of Congress upon questions of domestic policy.”

This doctrine was proclaimed from the stand by southwestern Whig speakers at the late Taylor ratification meeting in this city.

Mr. Chairman, from the present growing sentiment of the North, I am perfectly satisfied that the rights of the slave States can only be preserved by withholding from Congress the exercise of all doubtful powers; and in case of violation of this time-honored and hallowed rule of construction, then by the application of the veto principle.

The exercise of the veto is the last peaceable resort for the preservation of our rights in States where slavery exists. I know, that by the untiring efforts of designing men, much false learning has been infused into the public mind in reference to the veto principle in our Constitution. It is not an affirmative but a negative power, or rather principle, in the application of which the Executive does only and can only, in cases of constitutional doubt, public inexpediency, &c., continue the law then in force by preventing the passage of a new one. He stands as a sentinel between Congress and the people, and for the protection of their rights, in all cases of constitutional doubt, manifest inexpediency, or invasion by majorities of the rights of minorities; he hands the question back to the people, the legitimate source of all political power, for them in their wisdom to determine. The President, by the exercise of the veto, can make us no new law, therefore he can inflict no oppression upon the people. He only continues in force the existing law, which has met with the approbation and approval of the President and Congress, and this only for a limited time; for if the people desire the law, the passage of which he has prevented by the use of the veto, they can, in two years at furthest, return a Congress that will secure its passage, or in four years at most elect a President who will sanction the law they desire.

There are some remarkable facts connected with the history of the exercise of this veto. No President who has exercised that power has failed to be elected a second term, where he was a candidate for reelection. No President who has failed to exercise that power, save in one instance, has ever been reelected, though in every instance they have been candidates; thus showing a general acquiescence upon the part of the people in its application. The enemies of the Constitution of the United States—those who desire to change the form of Government bequeathed to us by our revolutionary fathers, by indirection, after the repeated rebukes of the people when attempted directly—those who desire to convert it into a Government of two, instead of three independent departments, complain loud and long that the will of the people is thwarted by the use of the veto.

Mr. Chairman, this veto power has been exercised some thirty times, beginning with President Washington, and in no solitary instance has its use failed to meet with the approbation and approval of the American people, where the question has been brought before them. The President has no power to increase legislation, but to prevent it for a time. One of the greatest curses that can visit a nation is too much legislation—is the making of too many laws, from which much confusion and contradictory opinions and decisions must flow. Would it not have been better that the alien and sedition law had never passed, and that the bankrupt law had been arrested by the President? Infinitely better. In the first case, freeborn Americans, whose arms and voices had mingled in our glorious revolutionary struggle, and relieved for us the blessings we now so abundantly enjoy, were thrown and confined for months in disgraceful dungeons, for the bare expression of opinions, in a country which boasted of its freedom! In the second case, millions of dollars were paid to honest creditors with a few cents, doubtless, in some instances, by the high crime of perjury. These laws were passed by Congress, manifestly against the will of the people. They demanded a repeal, and secured it; but much and irreparable injury was inflicted upon the nation's honor, and upon individual rights, before those laws were wiped from our statute books; the repeal of which cost the people thousands upon thousands of dollars in legislation.

These are some few of the beauties of an unbridled Congress, fresh from the people, reflecting their will by such monstrous and excessive legislation.

[Here the hour expired.]